**** Sebago Region Fisheries Newsletter****

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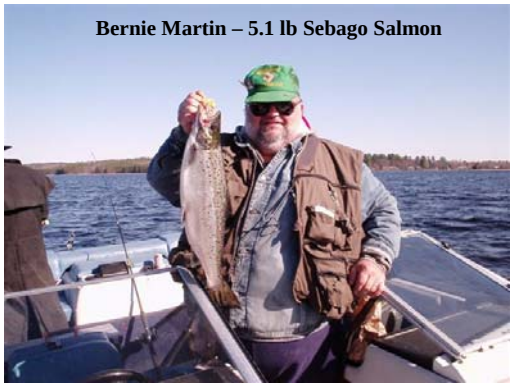
Current and past editions of our newsletter, as well as pictures of fish caught in the region may be viewed on the Department's home page (www.MEFISHWILDLIFE.com)

Sebago Lake Update

The smelt-spawning run started April 26th and developed into the best run we've seen in the last decade. Smelts ran up the Crooked River as far as the Route 302 Bridge. According to former IFW Advisory Council member Carroll Cutting, "you know you have a lot of smelts in the lake when smelts run up river that far". In addition, large schools of spawning smelts were observed off Quimby's beach and anglers reported large clouds of smelts off the Songo River. Smelts even ran in many of the brooks historically used along the western shore including Bachelder Brook, Burnell Brook, and Nason Brook.

As expected the spring fishing for lake trout and salmon was slower than many anglers would like due to reduced salmon stocking rates and declines in the togue population, but the fish being caught are in excellent condition. Three to five pound salmon (photo) and togue are common and we predict anglers will be catching salmon in the 7 to 8 pound class by the end of the summer. We know of at least two lake trout reported this spring that weighed in the mid to high "teens" (photo). Salmon growth rates have markedly increased over the last 4 years, in response to gains in the smelt population. These gains are sufficient to support a very modest increase in salmon stocking. Salmon stocking will be increased from 1000 to 2000 fish in 2006. The proposed level of stocking equates to about 20% of the rate typically applied to waters in southern Maine. This low level of stocking should not impact the smelt, given their current abundance. As long as the smelt population remains abundant and salmon growth remains good, salmon stocking rates will be cautiously and incrementally nudged up. This conservative management approach will reduce the potential for dramatic swings in the smelt population.

Bernie Martin – 5.1 lb Sebago Salmon



Bissonette Bros. – 17.5 lb Sebago Laker

The December 2005 edition of our newsletter provides an up to date summary of the most recent fishery information collected on Sebago Lake.

A clerk (Greg Massey) has been hired to conduct an angler survey (creel survey) for the entire 2006 open water fishing season. Aircraft counts of anglers will also be obtained on Sebago and 26 other waters in the region to obtain angler use information. These sampling efforts are in addition to other numerous data collection efforts undertaken annually on Sebago.

Following the capture of a single 5 lb northern pike back in June of 2003, only 4 additional northern pike have been captured (and confirmed) on Sebago, until April of 2006. Just a few weeks ago 3 additional pike were confirmed; two mature males and one immature (sex unknown). The immature pike was only 17 inches long and is the smallest pike taken from Sebago, suggesting that pike may have either successfully spawned in Sebago, or additional pike may have been introduced. The 17-inch pike has not been aged, but is probably one or two years old. We did recently receive information regarding the illegal stocking of pike, which was reported in an email as follows "*I had ice fished sabattus about 6 years back....the old guy next to us bragged about bringing pike down to sebago to mess with those GD biologist.....he didn't keep any pike alive that we saw that day, but said he had done it....we followed him to the boat ramp trying to get his plate, but were unable to...*." We encourage anglers to kill and hold all pike they catch,

and to then notify Jim, Brian, or myself at the Gray Headquarters (657-2345).

Stocking

Long awaited renovations to Embden Hatchery have been completed and this hatchery received its first load of finglerling brook trout last fall. Embden's greatly expanded fish-rearing capacity has freed up space in the three hatcheries (Dry Mills, New Gloucester, and Casco) that raise most of the fish stocked in southern Maine. This additional space will result in increased future production, particularly fall yearling (12 – 14") brook trout. We currently stock about 2,400 fall yearlings in southern Maine. Beginning in the fall of this year the fall yearling brook trout stocking program will be expanded by an additional 5,000 fish! Anglers should expect to see additional incremental production increases over the next several years.

Regulations

The December 2005 edition of our newsletter provided summary highlights of the new statewide smelt regulations that went into effect this year. Past editions of the newsletter is available online (www.mefishwildlife.com).

At the time of this writing regulation proposals have been drafted for the 2007 fishing season. We expect most changes will be well received, as many reflect changes being advanced under the Department's statewide regulation consolidation and simplification initiative. This initiative focuses on simplifying and clarifying Maine's fishing laws, which has been the subject of considerable past criticism. As a result, many of the proposed rule changes in Region A (as well as the rest of the state) are being proposed to make the law book more user friendly. This is the second year of regulation consolidation/simplification efforts, which will likely continue for several more years before completed. Each year the Department focuses on different fish and regulation categories. An important objective of this initiative is the identification of those regulations most effective in meeting the range of management objectives for each sport fish. When completed only a limited core group of regulations will remain available to manage the state's fisheries. This consolidation initiative represents a significant effort to overhaul the law book. Just last year there were over 40 different regulations that applied to brook trout lakes and ponds. Now there are less than 10. In addition to the consolidation of special water-specific regulations, efforts are also focusing on standardization of "general law" provisions where possible. For example, there are proposals to standardize general law minimum length limits for brown trout and bass.

Public hearings will be scheduled around the state over the summer/fall to provide the public an opportunity to comment on specific proposals. Also, in the near future the regulation proposals will be posted on the Department's web site. Most of the regulation changes proposed for Region A waters reflect efforts to consolidate, standardize, and simplify regulations.

Summer 2005 Netting on Brown Trout Lakes & Ponds

In our previous issue, we reported seven brown trout waters were sampled last summer to assess brown trout survival and size quality as part of an ongoing effort to identify waters where brown trout are/are not meeting size performance standards identified in the statewide brown trout plan. We analyzed the data over the winter months and the results are presented below (Table 1).

Table. 1 Summary of 2005 Brown Trout Sampling.

Waters Sampled	Length (in)	Weight (lbs)	K-Factor
Bickford P - Porter	17.8	3.2	1.16
Bradley P - Lovell	19.2	3.0	1.16
Burnt Meadow P - Brownfield	15.8	1.4	0.96
Clays P - Fryeburg	17.8	2.4	1.10
Deer P - Hollis	18.9	2.7	1.06
Ell P - Sanford	16.3	1.8	1.10
No Name P - Lewiston	18.0	2.1	1.01
All	17.9	2.4	1.10

All of the waters exceeded the average size quality objective of 15 inches, and only one water failed to meet the average weight criteria of 1.5 pounds established in the brown trout species plan. Five out of the seven waters produced a handful of quality-sized browns, as specified in the species plan (≥18-20").

Male and Female Browns
Deer Pond, Hollis

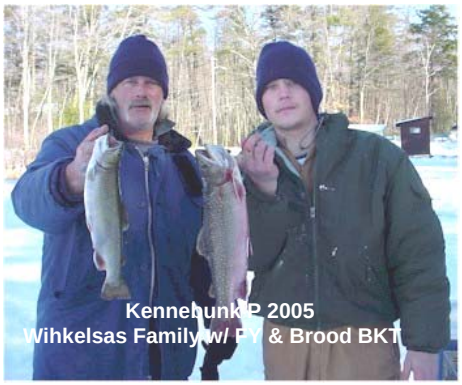
All the sampled brown trout fisheries were comprised of fish from several age classes. Although fish up to age VI+ were observed most browns were III-V+ years old. Younger age classes were not abundant, suggesting a potential survival issue that we hope to investigate in the future.

Bass Predation Study Update

Last spring, Thomas pond (Raymond) was the subject of a bass predation study, which investigated the fate of stocked spring yearling brook trout. The results indicated bass ate a significant portion of 9 -11 inch stocked brook trout in a relatively short period of time. We were able to estimate that bass ate 18% of the stocked brook trout within the first 24 hours after stocking. All but the largest of bass were capable of swallowing more than one brookie at any given time. To more fully understand the possible extent of predation over a given time period we need to determine how long it takes a bass to fully digest an average sized spring yearling brook trout. This spring we intend to feed spring yearling brook trout to a few bass held in a large tank and monitor digestion at regular time intervals. Once we determine the average time it takes a bass to digest a 9-11 inch brook trout we can more thoroughly analyze the Thomas Pond data and estimate the rate of predation.

Fisheries Misconceptions, Myths, and Rumors

Each year during our winter creel census work, regional staff encounters a growing number of anglers who have released fish with the expectation this practice will improve the future of the fishery. In many instances this philosophy holds true. Some of our waters are very capable of growing a trout or salmon and/or support wild reproduction. Sometimes putting a fish back in the water may lead to future growth and "catching it bigger next year" or future reproduction. However, anglers should be aware that Region A has developed many "put-and-take" winter brook trout fisheries in ponds that are too warm and shallow during the summer to provide year round habitat capable of supporting brook trout. These seasonal fisheries are created with combinations of stocked legal-size fall fingerling (8-12"), fall yearling (12-14"). In these types of waters stocked brook trout have no chance of future reproduction or even survival past the heat of summer. Anglers who enjoy eating trout are encouraged to harvest from these waters. A quick check of our online stocking report can reveal where these "put-and-take" winter fisheries exist. Retired brood brook trout (16-18") are also stocked with the intention that they will be harvested over the course of the winter or following spring. Some folk have reported catching stocked brood female brookies with eggs dropping out of them so they were released to spawn. Others have even claimed they stripped the eggs back into the hole before harvesting the fish so the eggs could hatch out. You don't have to feel guilty about harvesting these fish, as those eggs will not contribute to the fishery either way.


Kennebunk P 2005
Wihkelsas Family w/ PY & Brood BKT

Pond Reclamation Update

As reported in our last issue, we submitted a comprehensive permit application to reclaim Big Speck Pond in Norway last December. The Department of Environmental Protection recently issued a preliminary draft permit for the project, which is out for review. If all goes well, we plan on treating the pond late this summer and the pond would be restocked with brook trout in the fall of 2007.

Smelt Transfers

Each spring we typically collect smelt eggs from Bryant Pond in Woodstock, and transfer those eggs to other waters to either restore lost smelt populations or to supplement populations experiencing low abundance. Bryant has been our strongest and most reliable smelt run for the past few decades, and we only take smelt eggs if the run is strong and robust enough to support some removal. If egg densities are too high, there is reduced survival and hatching of underlying eggs due to suffocation, so removing a few layers of eggs on burlaps from heavy runs do not impact the donor water's smelt population.

New Hampshire Fish & Game has put smelt eggs into Great East Lake in Acton for the past couple years in an attempt to restore a forage base for the wild lake trout population. If successful, it is the desire of both Maine and New Hampshire to develop a salmon program. Anglers reported catching lake trout with smelts in their stomachs this past winter indicating some initial success. Working cooperatively with New Hampshire, we also transferred smelt eggs into Great East Lake. A smelt population "showed up" in Great East approximately ten years ago (presumably from an illegal introduction), but it was short lived and eventually disappeared. Hopefully, with a more deliberate and coordinated effort we can establish a viable population.

Update on Experimental Rainbow Trout Stockings

Periodically, we have presented updates on the experimental rainbow trout project. The study was to be conducted over a 4-5 year period in a variety of Maine waters and included three parts: field performance comparisons of browns and rainbows, field performance comparisons of brookies and rainbows, and hatchery performance comparisons among all three species. Following is a timeline for anticipated completion of the 3 reports:

Middle Range P – 4 lb Rainbow

(1) Data collection efforts for the brown trout and rainbow trout field performance comparisons were completed last fall, a draft report has been written by Jim Pellerin, and the report should be finalized by late spring/early summer of this year. Study objectives were: to examine and compare catch rates, returns, growth, and carry-over potential of rainbow and brown trout; and to evaluate whether rainbows may be more catchable than browns during mid-day hours. It is too early to let the "cat out of the bag", but it is safe to say that rainbows appear to have some promising performance characteristics in relation to brown trout.

(2) Data collection efforts for the brook trout and rainbow trout comparisons will be completed by this fall, and the final report will be written and submitted on a similar schedule as the brown trout report for 2007.

(3) Lastly, Jamie Bray of the Palermo hatchery has been collecting and summarizing the data for the hatchery report. Although he is currently right out straight with spring stocking, he plans to have a final report written by this fall.

Public Access

Leon Bucher was hired as MDIFW's Federal Aid Coordinator and "public access guy" early last winter. Before coming to MDIFW, Leon had worked in the private sector for several

large forest/timber companies as a forester and land manger. We welcome Leon to the "team", and look forward to working with him in the region.

Although we have several "irons in the fire" regarding various public access projects, few have come to any sort of resolution. A few highlights worth noting include:

- As of this writing we are scheduled to have a second meeting with the selectman of Peru to discuss revised plans for a proposed boat launch at Worthley Pond.
- Unfortunately, we lost a recent opportunity to acquire property for boat access to Panther Pond in Raymond. This water remains one of our highest priority waters in Southern Maine.
- Last year we had several complaints from anglers on the access to Mine Pond in Porter. Despite considerable efforts to work with the landowner, we were unable to come to a mutually agreeable alternative for allowing some reasonable form of public access to the pond. As a result, this spring we were forced to cancel all planned stockings to this pond. This small, undeveloped trout pond was stocked annually with brookies, browns, and occasionally a few unscheduled rainbows. The pond provided good trout fishing with several quality-sized trout being caught each season, and will certainly be a lost opportunity for Maine anglers. In the future we hope to explore the opportunity to re-establish access and a state-stocking program on this beautiful pond.
- This spring we plan to contact landowners of 6-12 private, traditional access sites and introduce them to our new access signs (December 2005 newsletter) and hope these interactions will: (1) improve relations between landowners, MDIFW, and anglers; (2) encourage landowners to continue traditional uses of these sites; and (3) deter future property abuses.

Regional Fishery Management Summaries

Each field season we go out into the field, collect different types of fishery data, and eventually enter most of this data into various computer applications. What happens to the data next is very important to the regional fisheries staff and anglers. When things slow down in the winter season, we divvy up the waters, review the data, analyze it, and write a brief management summary (typically 1-2 pages) for each specific water surveyed. A management summary usually includes the following: water name/date, purpose of visit, stocking history, current regulations, current findings (and often historical), conclusions, and recommendations. The investigations are then reviewed and discussed by all regional staff members, and edited as appropriate. Region A staff has been writing these so called Fishery Management Summaries or Investigations since 1996.

Following is a recent example of this process for Abbott Pond in Sumner:

1. The pond was sampled in 2000, as part of a larger project to evaluate regional stocking programs using fall fingerling brook trout.
2. After reviewing the data, Brautigam, concluded the pond seemed to have more potential to grow larger trout given its exceptional water quality and low angler use. Interspecific competition was identified as a potential cause, and a reduction in the stocking rate (1,300 to 900) was recommended.
3. The stocking rate change was implemented with the 2001 stocking allocation, which took effect in 2002.
4. The pond was re-sampled in 2005 to follow-up on the stocking change with the following results:

Data (n)-Year	BKT (12) - 2005	BKT (16) - 2000
Mean length	11.4"	8.9"
Min Length	9.4"	7"
Max Length	14.0"	11"
Mean weight	0.6lb	0.2lb
Mean k-factor	1.01	0.85
CPU	0.15	1.6

5. Although the CPUE dropped, there was a marked increase in fish size and even evidence of more carry-over.
6. New recommendations were: (1) maintain new stocking rate, (2) switch over the "wild" BKT strain to further increase survival, and (3) consider new regulation (2 TRT, Min 10" only 1>12) more consistent with our management goal of producing fish of above average size quality.
7. Re-evaluate management changes after several years.

Why are these simple, 1-2 page reports so important? Management summaries force us to review the data, state why we were there, and lead us to a set of recommendations or management changes designed to improve (if needed) the fishery. This process encourages follow-through and accountability of our work. In addition, the paper trail establishes an invaluable historical reference for ourselves and/or future biologists, which is important when much of the work we do takes place over the course of several years or even a decade or more.

Region A's Noteworthy Fish List

Below is a list of just a few trophy fish caught in Region A waters during the past winter fishing season.

Angler's Name	Weight & Fish	Location
Corey Martineau	4 lb Chain Pickerel	Stump P
Lyndon Rogers	8.6 lb Brown Trout	NA
Neal Dexter	5 lb Smallmouth Bass	Norway L
Bob Hogan	3.5 lb Rainbow Trout	Worthley P
Matt Wihkelsas	4 lb Brook Trout	Kennebunk P
Greg Massey	9.1 lb Lake Trout	M Range P